

# South–South volunteering and development

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While research to date on volunteering and development has largely focused attention on the global South as a place that ‘hosts’ volunteers and the global North as a place that ‘sends’, in this article we focus on movements of volunteers between countries in the South. Our objective is thus to consider ‘South–South’ flows of volunteers in order to provide a counter to dominant North–South imaginaries of international volunteering. However, we do not declare or celebrate South–South volunteering as ‘new’, rather our approach critically engages with the framing of this geography of international volunteering as offering benefits similar to those of wider South–South development cooperation. Drawing on interviews with volunteers and stakeholders in South–South volunteering, we draw out and explore three prominent themes: (1) how volunteers echo some of the wider discursive formulations of South–South development cooperation premised on commonalities within the global South; (2) how these commonalities meet limits at which a heterogeneity of the South is articulated through hierarchical orderings of relations between Southern constituents; and (3) the ways that racialised development imaginaries bring challenges to South–South volunteers. We thus argue that South–South volunteering works, re-works and contests established imaginaries of development, and their construction and ordering of sameness and difference. We argue further that caution is needed around claims of ‘newness’ of, or unqualified advocacy for, South–South volunteering, which instead needs to be subject to critical attention in the areas we highlight.

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Research on volunteering and development to date has largely focused attention on the global South as a place that ‘hosts’ volunteers and the global North as a place that ‘sends’ volunteers (Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011; Baillie Smith *et al.* 2013). Within these literatures, critiques have emerged around international volunteering and the colonial legacies underpinning much international volunteering work (Perold *et al.* 2013), the ways that benefits are often more orientated to the (Northern) volunteer (Jones 2011), and the importance and lack of critical pedagogies of development (Diprose 2012). North–South volunteer movements, for these scholars, take place within the uneven patterns of power we find in North–South development partnerships (Noxolo 2006) and development more generally (Mawdsley 2012). These critiques articulate with broader questionings of global North-led aid and development, and its colonial contingencies, power asymmetries and neoliberal citizenships (Baillie Smith *et al.* 2013 2016; Griffiths 2015; Kothari 2005; McEwan and Mawdsley

2012; Lyons *et al.* 2012). Such geographies, thus, both critique and privilege particular types of volunteer and the institutions that facilitate their work, producing a narrow account of the local and transnational relationalities of volunteering and development (Laurie and Baillie Smith 2017). Such narrowness looks away from the large numbers of volunteers who do not travel those same routes but whose contribution to development is increasingly recognised as significant [Haddock and Devereux 2016; United Nations Volunteers (UNV) 2015]. To broaden the account, in this article we explore an often only implicit question in research on volunteering: that non-Western volunteers might be better equipped – culturally, linguistically as well as technically – to undertake development work (e.g. Raymond and Hall 2008).

Our objective in this article is to focus on ‘South–South’ flows of volunteers in order to provide a counter to dominant North–South imaginaries of international volunteering. This focus is not intended to reify an undifferentiated ‘Southern’ category – it is

in many senses a misnomer, particularly when referring to volunteers from Asian settings such as China and South Korea – but rather to discuss ‘South–South’ as a policy label that has been used by donors and volunteer-engaging organisations to describe international volunteering flows outwith the North (e.g. Bannister 2017). This approach is timely given the growing emphasis on volunteers as a new set of development actors who are recognised and legitimised by a range of stakeholders (e.g. NGOs, faith groups, state and corporate interests alike), as well as being central to the recently launched Sustainable Development Goals (Haddock and Devereux 2016; UNV 2015). Our wish to refocus also relates, first, to the challenge to development and aid orthodoxies presented by the rise of ‘new’ aid donors and the reshaping of cooperation between non-Western and non-state actors (see Bond 2016; Mawdsley 2014; Mawdsley *et al.* 2014; de Renzio and Seifert 2014), and second, to the ways that ‘South–South’ volunteering might be considered an expression of these new forms of aid and development. While there has been relatively little academic research specifically focused on ‘South–South’ volunteering (for an exception see Butcher and Einolf 2016), policy communities have been engaged with the theme for some time (e.g. Brassard *et al.* 2010; Seo 2011; Ngutu 2011). This marginalisation in academic work must be considered an oversight. In 2012, 81 per cent of UNV volunteers came from the global South, and at its foundation in 1970, a Special Voluntary Fund was created to support the mobilisation of skilled volunteers from the global South (Lough *et al.* 2016). Chinese volunteering is growing rapidly in sub-Saharan African countries (Ceccagno and Graziani 2016) and South Korea is now the third largest sender of volunteers globally (Brassard *et al.* 2010, 13). What is notable about these policy literatures is a characterisation of South–South volunteering as offering important benefits compared with North–South volunteering, mirroring similar claims made about wider South–South development cooperation. Explicitly: just as ‘shared experience’ and ‘shared identity’ (Mawdsley 2012, 263) have become important constructions of non-Western development cooperation, so too are ‘shared understanding, and similar systems, processes, living conditions, and cultures’ (Brassard *et al.* 2010, xi) considered advantageous conditions for South–South forms of volunteering for development.

Locating this research within this geography, it is not our intention to declare or celebrate South–South volunteering as ‘new’; to do so would miss longer histories and forms of international voluntary action (see Craggs 2011). Rather, our approach in this paper is a critical engagement with this framing, not an acceptance of it. Specifically, we discuss interviews with volunteers and stakeholders in South–South volunteering in and from Asia in the context of critical

scholarship on volunteering and the changing geopolitics of aid and development. We highlight three prominent themes in the data to show (1) how volunteers echo some of the wider symbolic and discursive (Mawdsley 2012) formulations of South–South development cooperation premised on commonalities within the global South; (2) where these commonalities meet limits at which, as we might expect, a heterogeneity of the South is articulated through hierarchical orderings of relations between Southern constituents; and (3) the ways that racialised development imaginaries bring challenges to South–South volunteers. We thus argue that South–South volunteering works, re-works and contests established imaginaries of development, and their construction and ordering of sameness and difference. We argue further that caution is needed around claims of ‘newness’ of, or unqualified advocacy for, South–South volunteering, which instead needs to be subject to critical attention in the areas we highlight.

The article proceeds in five sections. The first section outlines the methodologies used in this research. The second section explores how claims of sameness are articulated by volunteers from the South. Shared identities and experiences are here brought to the fore and understood as advantageous in development work. In the third section we turn to how volunteers, within this sameness, assert ‘new’ hierarchies within the South through a discourse of difference. The fourth section foregrounds the ways that racialised development imaginaries present a challenge to South–South volunteers and highlights the legitimising and deligitimising effects of ethnicity. The final section discusses the tensions between a homogeneous notion of the South within South–South volunteering (predicated on ‘sameness’) and the heterogeneity inherent within a ‘new’ hierarchy of development (predicated on ‘difference’). In the conclusion we map these tensions onto a broader discussion of South–South development cooperation.

## Methodology

The data we discuss in this paper derive from discussions with an international development NGO with a specific interest in exploring South–South volunteering, who helped identify relevant stakeholders and interviewees. This small-scale exploratory project sought to identify initial themes to inform future scholarship and practice, given the lack of research on South–South volunteering to date. Our focus purposefully reflects a particular subset of volunteering mobilities between countries outside the global North – those brokered by international civil society actors working in development – since this interpretation and realisation of South–South cooperation is an increasingly significant feature of volunteering and development policy (e.g. Ngutu 2011; Cuso International 2017; Bannister 2017; FK Norway 2015). For these reasons,

we do not engage with other forms of volunteering mobilities in the South, some of which have long histories, such as faith-based mobility, and some of which are newer, such as volunteering linked to Chinese state agency engagement in Africa.

Our decision to focus on NGO-brokered volunteering reflects an interest in bringing civil society actors' recent framing of 'South–South' volunteering into dialogue with newly established geographies of 'North–South' development volunteering. Building from longstanding networks with partner NGOs, the research deployed snowball sampling to engage a group of participants whose institutional framing and mobilities are reflective of such 'South–South' geographies. This is not to deny the relevance and significance of wider histories and materialities of development interactions in Asia, but to recognise the specific context of this paper.

Data were collected through 11 interviews, comprising six interviews with staff managing and coordinating volunteers at different scales, and five interviews with volunteers during and after their placements. For the former, we interviewed one volunteer programme manager for a large non-Western donor agency, an Asia region NGO manager, an NGO country manager from China, an NGO country manager from Bangladesh and two interviews with UNV programme staff in one south Asian country, not named here for reasons of anonymity. In terms of volunteers, we interviewed two volunteers from China after their placement, of whom one had volunteered in Bangladesh and one in Kenya, two volunteers from the Philippines who were volunteering in Bangladesh at the time, and one from Kenya who had recently finished volunteering in Bangladesh. Interviews varied in length from one to two hours, with six conducted face to face and five via skype. Interviews were conducted in English, since all programme volunteers, managers and coordinators were required to have strong English, although we acknowledge that this further underlines the specifics of our focus and sample. In recognition of the many forms of global English that are spoken, the quotations given in this paper retain the different idioms used by the participants. The interviews with the managers and coordinators focused on processes of recruitment, placement decisions, allocations and support, post-volunteering experiences and networks, and future plans for 'South–South' volunteering. The interviews with volunteers focused on their decisions to volunteer, where they volunteered, their role and experiences, and their post-volunteering experiences and reflections. The interview data were analysed using NVIVO.

Additionally, the paper draws on collaborations with wider development actors, including research collaborations with Voluntary Service Overseas since 2009 on diaspora volunteering and the post-volunteering experiences and activities of volunteers; Baillie Smith's work with the International Federation of Red

Cross and Red Crescent Societies since 2012, including as part of their Global Review on Volunteering (Hazeldine and Baillie Smith 2015); and the Swedish Red Cross, as part of the Volunteers in Conflicts and Emergencies Initiative (ViCE). It also reflects Baillie Smith's and Laurie's participation in stakeholder fora, such as recent UNV workshops and debates, bringing together key global academics and policy-makers (e.g. UN actors, donor agencies, national government representatives) to identify and respond to critical volunteering and development challenges, and ongoing research and policy dialogues with individual NGOs engaged in South–South and related forms of volunteering. This work may not formally constitute ethnographic data collection or other more conventional forms of data gathering. However, our engagement in the co-production of knowledge for advocacy has fed into volunteering policy development globally (Seelig and Lough 2015). Participation in these activities has in turn informed our research, including that discussed here.

### **A homogeneous South: identity, experience and legitimacy**

In this section we discuss how 'sameness' is articulated by volunteers from the South through themes of shared identities and experiences. These continuities between Southern constituents and countries are prominent throughout the data and, cumulatively, present an imaginary of a homogeneous sense of 'Southernness' that is assumed to better equip volunteers to engage in development work in poorer areas of the South. This was evident, for example, in the following exchange where Luisa, a volunteer from the Philippines, emphasises different layers of sameness to discuss her volunteering in Bangladesh:

For me it's really ... because the culture is totally similar so I did not have difficulty to adjust ... and I didn't have difficulty to bond with the people. Because we have similar culture like food, clothing, you know? And also an indigenous people ... and I am in the [indigenous] community.

Of particular note in this extract is that, notwithstanding the ostensible differences between quite distant parts of Asia, Luisa perceives a sameness in that international volunteering does not require social and cultural adjustment, but also in that a further layer of connection is found in shared identification as indigenous. Luisa then goes on to talk about what this shared identity means in terms of 'belonging', and the ways that the community in which she works make clear to her 'we're not considering you a different person, we consider you our own'. Similarly, Sana, a Country Manager in Bangladesh, emphasised this dynamic, explaining an important aspect in the way she manages her cohort of volunteers:

for the north volunteer we're saying 'don't pay too much attention to the village politics' [but] on the other hand [for] the south volunteers you don't have to put that message because they are from that culture.

The local context is presented as unknowable for volunteers from the North, whereas it is entirely the opposite for volunteers from the South. Again, important differences within the South are absented and disparate areas are brought into commonality with Bangladesh:

in Kenya there's also you know, village politics [in] common ... India they're saying the village [is] common, in Philippines, they are not that experienced with village politics but they said 'we have that experience [in that area]'.

Sana thus draws Bangladesh into a 'Southern commons' where geographically and culturally diverse settings – from Kenya, India and the Philippines – are marked by commonality.

What is important to note at this stage is the articulation of an imaginary of shared identity across the South. A related aspect of the data was volunteers seeking to nuance the notion of a Southern commons by noting slight differences within the South, while all the time maintaining a unifying difference from the North. This is apparent, for example, in the words of Kay, a Chinese volunteer in Bangladesh, who commented:

There's some difference, because if there come some volunteer from the UK it is 'Oh, it's a foreigner', but when I come ... my face is very close to theirs – I mean the colour – so [the community] treats us as from another country but not so completely different with us. I think it's better, cos we can have better communication especially some environment, climate or the cultural.

There is a richness to the way Kay locates himself in relation to his development work, where race, culture and even physical environment play important roles in the articulation and negotiation of sameness and difference. While it is certainly true that skin tone varies significantly between these two countries, Kay nonetheless positions himself as contingent – 'not so completely different' – and volunteers from the North as expressly different, unequivocally 'foreign'. Significantly, this identification underpins a claim to the material advantage of 'better communication' in his work. Connectedly, the particular commonality of physical environment expressed here came to the fore in interviews with other volunteers, especially Maria, a volunteer agronomist from the Philippines also working in Bangladesh:

South Asia countries [are similar to work in] because the weather conditions are same as Philippines so crops are

almost same as Philippines so I can explore more, I can learn from the ... people also, what technology they're using ... in terms of agriculture so I can compare with Philippine soil ...

What we see here is the way in which a historically constructed, shared thematic of 'development' – the introduction of specific crops and associated technological and production regimes – represents a homogenous set of 'technopolitics' (Mitchell 2002) that are easily recognisable across the South. For this volunteer there is an important material advantage to climatic similarity in that it offers the possibility of mutual learning on the basis of that sameness, where agricultural expertise can – apparently – be transposed across space.

Further commonalities lie in volunteers' experiences of shared cultural norms, ones which they portray as characteristically Southern. Chloe, a volunteer from China placed in Kenya suggests a shared sensibility around the particular processes of forward planning and objective setting that define much mainstream development activity, that can underpin productive encounters and development outcomes:

I think that the advantage is because of philosophy of China is similar to the African country because we all think that you had to 'go with the flow' you know? Because from the EU and the UK and also other people they would like to make a plan *once*. For China, yeah, we make the plan, but not that particular thing ... sometimes we're just spontaneous, but African country, they are *more* spontaneous than us. So for me I think it is easier to understand how they behave because partially we think that as well, but not that extremely like they, you know? Yeah. So I think it is easier for us to understand and then take the actions, we don't feel annoyed because that's part of our life as well.

In concert with the other volunteers above, Chloe seeks differentiation from global North volunteers while also retaining an element of difference by placing China and her host country in Africa at different points in a continuum of spontaneity. Once again, difference from the North is articulated through a discourse of commonality, and that commonality is nuanced through an assertion of difference within the South. Importantly, through these identifications, it is perceived that 'it is easier for us to understand and then take actions', reinforcing the idea that shared identities and experiences in South–South volunteering bring material benefits.

The volunteer perspectives discussed here broadly cohere with the characterisation of South–South volunteering as a productive counter to North–South models. Claims to sameness and shared identities and experience – most evident here in terms of indigeneity, skin colour, climate, and cultural norms – are understood to bring very real benefits to the work



the volunteers do on the ground. While these perceptions of commonalities override at times quite considerable differences in the very same terms (of indigeneity, skin colour, climate, and cultural norms), they do enable volunteers to identify as better equipped to communicate, provide expertise on agricultural issues, and even understand the often place-specific dynamics of village politics. In their review of international volunteering in Asia, Brassard *et al.* (2010, 22) identified exactly these points in the construction of South–South volunteer programmes; that the ‘benefits of Asia-to-Asia placements’ emerge from the understanding and expertise gained from the shared ‘systems, processes, living conditions and cultures’. In this sense, the subjectivity of South–South volunteers, alongside those promoted by programme organisers as pointed out in Brassard *et al.*’s review, can be located within broader discursive constructions of South–South development cooperation that are underpinned by ‘shared experience, developing status, and some geographical commonalities ... [and] a specific expertise in appropriate development approaches and technologies’ (Mawdsley 2012, 263). We thus reach the first theme that we argue in this paper: that South–South volunteers draw on a discursive imaginary of a homogeneous South to articulate and assert their (greater) legitimacy as development actors. That volunteers draw on such an imaginary, however, brings with it the imperative to examine critically how this claimed legitimacy depends also on a heterogeneous conceptualisation of the South and the hierarchical power relations within, and how they may relate to similar orderings among ‘new’ development actors. It is on this ordering that we focus in the following section.

### The heterogeneous South: expertise, hierarchy and difference

Alongside the discussion of common or shared identities, we have sought to keep in view subtle or nuanced expressions of difference within the apparent sameness of the South. In many of the cases we discuss above, sameness gives way to similarity such that, for instance, where Luisa surveys geographies of indigeneity and marks the Philippines out as similar but ‘not-quite’ the same, or when Chloe likens Chinese approaches to those of Kenyan volunteers and host communities, but only ‘partially’ so. In this section we focus fully on these expressions to explore where similarity moves towards difference to illustrate how ‘new’ hierarchies within the South are asserted through volunteering. For Sana, the Country Manager in Bangladesh, for instance, particular development histories are assumed to be embodied in volunteers from particular places:

Kenya is very good on community mobilisation, they have a number of good models on community

mobilisation [as does] Sri Lanka [there might be] a global strategy to increase the number of [volunteers] from Sri Lanka or Kenya.

We begin here to get a sense of the differentiated geographies of country-specific volunteer capabilities. Seb, a regional volunteering manager for Asia, makes a similar observation to Sana’s:

If I look at the volunteers that we’ve recruited, particularly from Asia, then the skills that we’re recruiting are no different than recruiting from the North, if I look at China, the skills we’ve had around gender empowerment, gender specialists, doctors, urban planners, HIV specialists they’ve been fairly the same as the North ...

The locating of expertise in Kenya, Sri Lanka and China in these cases might be read as a legitimisation for global South volunteers, and in many ways complements the discourse of sameness discussed in the previous section: whatever the differences *within* the South, they are set aside towards an assertion of distinction from the North. Nonetheless, there is a clear hierarchical relation here to do with expertise where Kenya, Sri Lanka and China especially are framed as authoritative presences in different parts of the South because of specialisms in various areas of knowledge, much like Western or Northern actors have been through the history of development.

We might read these hierarchical relations as a coming together of different histories of development. On the one hand is the trace of long-established perceptions within the South of ‘developed’ and ‘under-developed’ where, say, China’s imperial past returns as a contemporary, culturally held notion of superiority behind the break-neck speed of industrialisation that sets it apart from many of its south and south-east Asian neighbours (see Fairbank 1992; Oakes 2012). In this context, the setting apart of North from South would seem to open the way to revisiting older perceptions of superiority within the ‘new’ actors in South–South development cooperation. On the other hand, there is a simultaneous trace of Northern-led development histories where, while the North is quite assertively displaced as the arbiter of expertise, the ideal of expertise is far from dismissed, and it is in fact recalibrated and reoriented around a different, seemingly Southern geography. For instance, the perceived value of professionalism in volunteering is prominent in this response from Sana in Bangladesh:

Of the volunteers coming from the South, for them ... we are probably putting more emphasis on informal management ... because north volunteers are, they really like to, get into the work straight away and done because [they are from] a very professional country. Volunteers from South maybe they have some problem ... so for them we are also saying that how we can really take developing more professionally?

There is a familiar ordering of North–South relations in development here: Northern volunteers are understood to be professionalised because of their approaches to accountability, punctuality and productivity, while Southern volunteers are implicitly outside of these measures of professionalism, echoing and replicating a prominent ideal of Northern-led development work and international volunteering (Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011; Nightingale 2005; Simpson 2005).

In Sana's quote immediately above, her closing question – 'how we can really take developing more professionally?' – calls Southern volunteers into a trajectory of professionalisation. A number of interviewees took up the same theme. For instance, for Luisa from the Philippines, punctuality provided a marker of difference in categorising behaviours as more or less professional:

like starting late in a meeting, like waiting for hours for someone. It's really natural for them here [in Bangladesh]. In the Philippines we also have that but we're not late for two hours we're late for thirty minutes but not two hours.

Punctuality for Luisa becomes a marker of difference that came to be expressed hierarchically, enabling her to position herself towards a sensibility closer to that of the 'professional country'. We would argue that this signals not only a heterogeneity to the category of 'South' volunteers (as we would expect) but that also South–South volunteering can facilitate the (re) production of hierarchical relations. Another quite pointed example of this dynamic came in the interview with Kay, a Chinese volunteer in Bangladesh (quoted also above), who draws on cultural stereotypes of laziness to assert difference:

I have [a] flexible vision of poverty and a developing country ... sometimes it's not only about the natural resource but related to the people, related to the lifestyle there, because they were very lazy actually. Lazy is a problem, sometimes the politics, or the war - but we found laz[iness] is a problem. Specifically in Bangladesh the population is a problem ... they don't have many modern factory, manufacturing and the population are lazy ...

Brought abruptly to the surface here is an uncomfortable reconfiguring, those at the bottom are late, less professional, lazy even; those at the top are the implicit self to this other and, as ever, dictate the terms of hierarchical relations.

While the policy rhetorics and discursive formulations of South–South cooperation assert difference and a challenge to Northern-led development hierarchies and norms based on sameness, the data presented here suggest that those hierarchies are not displaced in South–South volunteering but reworked and reconfigured. For interviewees such as Chloe, Seb, Sana, and

Kay especially, place continues to be used as a hierarchical marker of difference in development knowledge and expertise, legitimising and enabling behaviours and practises for volunteers from specific countries in the South. In these examples, at the same time as volunteers evoke a category homogeneous in its difference from, for example, 'UK volunteers' (Kay, second section above), they also nuance that category as heterogeneous within itself. Within this, as we have discussed, we can locate contingencies with longer histories of hierarchy both within and outwith the South: volunteers from 'more developed' places (China) are positioned as morally superior in 'lazy' Bangladesh, and other Southern volunteers are valued according to how they relate to Northern-led development ideals such as professionalisation. The 'sameness' of South–South volunteering, then, meets limits at which a heterogeneity to the South is articulated through hierarchical orderings of relations between Southern constituents.

### Challenging 'old' perceptions of legitimacy

In this final section discussing the data, we draw attention to the ways historical Northern development imaginaries present a challenge to South–South volunteers. Specifically, we draw attention to an aspect of the data suggesting that the persistence of racialised imaginaries of development undermine the legitimacy of South–South volunteers as development actors. This was evident, for instance, in an interview with John, a volunteer from Kenya working in Bangladesh, who noted that volunteers from the South are hindered because of their difference from more 'legitimate' actors from the North: 'they [beneficiary communities] start with the conception that the European are better than the African volunteer because they are used to the European and American'. Such ordering of volunteers according to provenance was a prominent theme in the data, especially where interviews turned to relations with host communities and in-community partner organisations. A marked example came in a discussion between Luisa and Maria, two Filipino volunteers working in Bangladesh, who explain how the paler skin colour of a colleague, Christine, who is German, shaped the ways that their host community positions them:

- Luisa: For me it's totally different because how they receive Christine ... people are particularly amused because she is white.
- Maria: Yeah, the colour matters ...
- Luisa: Yeah.
- Maria: Colour matters ...
- Luisa: I get the feeling I am discriminated because they say 'hello' to her and not to

me because they think I'm one of their own ...

In this example the very sameness that Kay cites above to do with 'my face is very close to theirs' that facilitates 'better communication' seemingly works in the opposite way for Luisa (and presumably Maria). For Luisa, her sameness in terms of skin tone marginalises her with material effects, as she went on to explain:

I worked as a research assistant [in English] for how many years and ... I told my organisation about that but when they were preparing a paper they went to Christine because they think she has more English or – or whatever.

There is thus a clear equivalence made between skin colour and linguistic competence and this, in turn, gives effect to racial difference in hierarchical ways where whiteness signifies greater legitimacy.

The same was true for in-community partners where larger organisations who promote South–South volunteering programmes met with some uncertainty on the ground. This was the case for Seb, the regional volunteering manager for Asia quoted above, who commented that partner demand was closely related to colour of skin:

So [the volunteers] perceive there being a hierarchy and I think that hierarchy does exist that in terms of development partner demand for volunteers, of course a white volunteer is top of the list – and again, from being a volunteer I understand particularly from a cultural side that Western, Northern people tend to be very much more vocal around their demands and tend to be serviced in those demands a little bit quicker than perhaps others ...

What is particularly notable here is not only the hierarchical ordering of skin colours but also the conflation of 'Western, Northern people' and whiteness. Within this conflation, too, is a material effect similar to that noted by Luisa; just as her supposed efficacy is lessened because of racial assumptions around linguistic capacities, so too is the efficacy of voice in the volunteers to whom Seb refers. Of further note, as Seb continued to speak about race, is a gendered aspect of the racialised hierarchies of volunteer relations:

The perception of Southern volunteers is very different, the way they are perceived, that they are seen as a kind of substitute, as a second best and that 'we'd rather have a white person if it's possible, and if that could be a male even better'.

Here we have a quite concise articulation of the legacies of colonialism and Northern-led development

that have established white European men as authoritative figures in the South. Such positioning puts South–South volunteers in a place of ambivalence; while skin colour might facilitate more equal exchanges (as evidenced above in the second section), it also subjects certain volunteers to subordinating hierarchies.

Considered in this context, South–South volunteering exists in a field of racialised hierarchies where volunteers from the North might be considered more desirable or credible actors in development, or more succinctly: in these cases volunteers are legitimised and delegitimised along lines of race (see Cheung Judge 2016). While the sample discussed here is relatively small, it is of troubling note that the promise of South–South volunteering as a more equal or de-colonial mode of cooperation is challenged by signs of the persistence of the racialised and gendered imaginaries of mainstream, Northern-led development. In this sense, the displacement of the historical figure of a white/male/Anglophone development expert is only partial; he returns as an ideal from which volunteers from the South can fall short in the eyes of communities and partner organisations. The material effects of this unfavourable comparison, these testimonies would suggest, are the reduced capacity to be considered legitimate workers in development.

### Conclusion: South–South' volunteering and development

The research presented here highlights a number of tensions around a homogeneous notion of the South in volunteering debates – predicated on 'sameness' – and a heterogeneity that grows out of 'new' hierarchies that seem inevitable amid the rise of new development actors. Our objective has been to broaden the account of development volunteers by turning the focus away from North–South models, and to consider instead the growing number of volunteers who travel within the South to embark on development work. In this concluding discussion we seek to reconnect with broader debates on South–South cooperation (see Bond 2016; Mawdsley 2014; Mawdsley *et al.* 2014; de Renzio and Seifert 2014). By way of conclusion, then, we explicate the ways that South–South volunteering is inextricably tied to broader imaginaries of development, both those long established of the North, and those considered to be 'new' of the South.

In previous writing on international volunteering, largely focused on Northern actors working in the South, scholars have revealed the importance of popular, corporate and state imaginaries of development in constructing who volunteers, where they volunteer and how they volunteer. For instance, 'CV-building' (Jones 2011) or a 'quest for career and personal development' (Devereux 2008, 358) for volunteers from the North cannot be separated from the desired subjectivities required to compete in a

neoliberalised jobs market, or the increased cultural capital of popular humanitarianism (Mostafanezhad 2014). Nor can ‘paternalistic’ (Perold *et al.* 2013) volunteer roles such as teacher or expert (Raymond and Hall 2008) be separated from historical and contemporary relations of domination and exploitation between the North and South. Thus, popular, corporate and state understandings of development give particular meanings to the encounters that volunteering promises, to the subjectivities constitutive of those encounters, to the places in which the encounters take place, and to the potential for development through volunteer work (Baillie Smith *et al.* 2013; Griffiths and Brown 2016). In this way encounters with difference are a dominant framing of North–South volunteering, its negotiation giving rise to both emphasis on and a search for commonalities between constituents of the North and South. The dominant imaginary in these literatures, of course, relies in part on a homogeneous conceptualisation of the South as the ‘poor’ host for development and volunteer work.

The recourse by the volunteers and volunteer managers to homogeneity documented here, therefore, might sit uneasily. For geographers working on development especially, notions of a homogeneous global South are instinctively pushed against. In the cases discussed in the first section above, however, homogeneity is seemingly mobilised to assert difference and autonomy from Northern-led development agendas. We might draw attention here to distinctions between different geographies of development cooperation, as Emma Mawdsley (2012, 266) has pointed out: ‘whereas the West deploys a symbolic regime of charity and benevolence ... Southern donors invoke a rhetoric of solidarity, mutual benefit and shared identities’. It has long been recognised in research on North–South volunteering that ‘paternalistic charity’ (Devereux 2008, 358) and a language of ‘helping’ (Griffiths 2016) place volunteers within dominant imaginaries of development. What is offered here, in the perception of Southern homogeneity, is evidence of South–South visions of development emerging and being reproduced in equivalent geographies of volunteering. Our research only scratches a surface of what is sure to be a rich site of development cooperation between Southern actors that draws on similar discourses of ‘solidarity, mutual benefit and shared identities’ (see Brassard *et al.* 2010).

Somewhat contrastingly, the second theme we emphasise here reveals an ambivalent relationship with Western-centric perspectives on volunteering and development (and indeed raises the question of whether relationships with Western-centric perspectives is at all a concern). On the one hand, a wish to document heterogeneity is worked towards: the volunteers in the research present a varied geography of the South that reasserts the differences that are swept away when we deploy terms such as the ‘South’.

We thus learn of particular skill sets in, say, Kenya and China; the gradations of foreign-ness and commonality among volunteers and host communities; and shared identities of people across vast expanses of the South. However, as some point out, this shared-ness, or similarity, gives way to difference, which is in turn expressed hierarchically. At the more extreme poles, for example, Chinese volunteers provide expertise ‘just like the North’ while low levels of development in Bangladesh are attributed to ‘laziness’. We might argue from here that this hierarchical arrangement of ‘new’ development actors is further reflective of emergent development imaginaries that are less to do with the ‘rhetoric of solidarity’ referred to above and more to do with the power and political interests of major actors in South–South cooperation (McEwan and Mawdsley 2012). That China and Bangladesh are spoken of in such contrasting terms by the interviewees here is important and should be a critical part of the future research agenda on international volunteering. While not overlooking shared identities and experiences, such a research agenda might track the ways that hierarchies *within* the South as well as *between* South and North inflect volunteer relations on the ground.

A future research agenda in this area might also interrogate how and why, while the North is (in many positive ways) not the only organising frame of reference, many of the underpinning tenets of these hierarchies – to do with professionalisation, productivity, expertise – are suspiciously analogous to the existential terms of Northern-led development practices. This is not to say that these themes are exclusively Western, but it would be an oversight not to examine the genealogies and materialities of these ‘new’ hierarchies. Connectedly, as the third theme we discuss above highlights, future research should aim to focus fully on the pervasiveness of Northern imaginaries of development where the idealised actor of development is not a volunteer from, say, Kenya or China, but is in fact a white, English-speaking man. For volunteers from the South, our research here suggests, their Otherness from this figure can devalue their work as legitimate development actors. If this is the case, it is incumbent on researchers and practitioners to explore and engage with the power relations that underpin such hierarchical orderings of international volunteers.

We thus argue that South–South volunteering works, re-works and contests established imaginaries of development, and their construction and ordering of sameness and difference. We argue further that caution is needed around claims of ‘newness’ or unqualified advocacy, and that instead South–South volunteering needs to be subject to critical attention in the areas we highlight. Our call is then for a counter to dominant North–South imaginaries of international volunteering through critical engagement with the relations between homogeneity and heterogeneity within and outwith the South, and a sustained



engagement with the challenges that racialised development imaginaries bring to South–South volunteers.

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